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THE ROUND TABLE

THE LABORATORY METHOD AT MIDDLEBURY COLLEGE

In a recent number of the *English Journal*, the Middlebury College September bulletin, *A Freshman Course in English*, was reviewed. In that review attention was called to the method of instruction we are using, which, in default of a better name, we have called a laboratory method.

In Middlebury we are endeavoring to get from the course in Freshman English the maximum return in the training of the student's powers of thinking. Heretofore we have felt the course to be getting away from us; the greater the effort we put forth, the smaller seemed to be the return. We determined to increase the demand made upon the thought-power of the student and to see to it that he met the demand. Our method of doing this has been to make the work as specific as possible through setting the pupil certain thought-problems to work out, and, to make sure that the work was adequately done, by having it all done in our presence. The results in effectiveness have gone far beyond our anticipations. The idea was simply to get control of a situation which was fast eluding us. We got that control and we also obtained many advantages that were unforeseen.

We had not foreseen the chance we were to have to guide and correct the thought-processes of the student; to show him how to work; to insist upon intellectual tidiness and accuracy; to curb the rush of those who worked too rapidly to be effective; and to give self-confidence to those whose minds were slow and who were overwhelmed in the ordinary classroom. In short, we discovered that we were teaching all the time and were producing results far more enduring than simple facility in the expression of thought. While we found the work exacting, it became a pleasure because it was effective.

Nor had we wholly foreseen the inevitable economy in time and effort that resulted in combining the process of thinking a thing out and writing it down, with the conference upon it. We found ourselves first watching the steps in the developing thought and correcting errors therein by guiding the judgments of our students, and then following through the process of composition of the thought already corrected in order to see that it received the wisest expression possible. When the

result was finally handed in we found that composition and correction had been virtually completed.

As all the work is individual we build on individual knowledge, calling the student's attention only to errors which he himself makes. We are thus enabled to make the whole course of the maximum value in training both the powers of thinking and habits of expression of the individual students.

It happens that the problems we set them are critical literary problems, because we feel that, with our training, problems of this nature are the kind we can most efficiently handle. But we also feel that the field in which the problem is assigned is relatively unimportant. The specific, definite line of thought is the thing to be aimed at in any problem. The steps in our problems are roughly: first, an analysis of a specific essay to get the thought in its relations clearly in the mind of the student in order that he may form intelligent judgments concerning it; second, the examination of the essay, point by point, in the light of a principle of composition which is also, practically, a principle of thinking; and third, a short composition stating the results of this examination. The problems are not easy; they call for long-continued and detailed thinking, and precision in reporting results.

The results as a whole have been satisfactory. By utilizing the full time of the laboratory in individual teaching we have effected economy in the teacher's time and greater efficiency in his work. We have also made the period yield its full value to each student. He is getting a much larger return for the time and energy expended; that is, we have greatly increased the value of the course to the student. All these things have seemed to us worth while.

FRANK W. CADY

A LITERARY MAP OF LONDON

A Ward-Lock *Guide-Book* of London and its immediate environs gave me an ideal outline for a literary map to be made by older students of Dickens, Thackeray, etc. The map is a convenient size and covers the district from Hampton Court east to Greenwich and extends as far north as Hampstead Heath. The students copied the line of the Thames from the guide-book map and from each other's maps and have filled in at their leisure the places of literary interest. Some of the students use colored inks, after systems of their own, and make their maps very rich in reminiscences of the real and the (no less real) fictitious characters of London-town.

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